

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR JESUS AND BUDDHA

(Note to discussion leader: these questions invite thoughtful reflection. You may want to select just a few, or you may want to take more than one period for discussion.)

1. Paul Knitter says Buddhism helped him “*experience the reality of God*” within himself and within the world. He says, “*in other words what I call God is not an entity out there who has to step into my life.*”

- Do you experience the reality of God? If so how?
- Is your experience of God relational – someone outside of you, or something inside of you, not separate? Or do you experience the reality of God both ways?
- Is experiencing the reality of God something you are seeking in your life? If so, is this sense of the reality of God something that is growing in you or does it stay the same?
- Has your meditation practice (or your prayer life) helped deepen your experience of God? If so, please say more about this.

2. Father Kennedy says that Buddhism is not about faith, rather it is a skill, like learning to play the piano, and faith need not enter into it. He also says that meditation can enrich your faith – have you found this to be true?

3. “*All things are impermanent*” is a central teaching of Buddhism

- How does this awareness of impermanence affect you? Is it a frightening thought? A comforting thought? A sad thought? Does it evoke “wonder?” Do you see life and death as two things, or part of one thing?
- How do you deal with the many losses that impermanence brings to each of us? Are you helped by Buddhism, Christianity, or any other faith tradition?

4. Professor Chung says that during your meditation if you continue to ask yourself the question “***Who am I?***” and continue to answer “***I don’t know.***” You will eventually “*find the answer and you will find your true self. Then you will not suffer any more.*”

- What does she mean by this? What truth is she getting at?
- Have you asked yourself, “Who am I?” If so, what did you discover?
- Why does she say that if we find our true self we won’t suffer anymore? Do you think that is universally true or just her personal experience?
- Have your struggles and anxieties helped you find yourself?

5. Professor Chung says, “We don’t always know what we need to be happy?” Do you agree?

6. Professor Chung refers to the “don’t know mind”,

- What does she mean? What is the value of not knowing?
- She says the bigger her ‘don’t know’ gets, the bigger her freedom gets. Why would that be true?
- In what ways do you feel free? in what ways do you feel unfree?

7. Father Kennedy’s teacher, Yamada Roshi, said to him, “*I’m not trying to make you a Buddhist, I’m trying to empty you in imitation of your Lord, Jesus Christ, who emptied himself.*”

- Have you experienced being emptied? What does that mean in your life?
- What have you not emptied? Does it get in your way?

8. Paul Knitter says that enlightenment means, *"We wake up to the fact that all things are profoundly related."* Do you ever experience yourself as "profoundly" related to all things, or is it just a concept? Say more about this.

9. Paul Knitter is deeply moved and excited by the teaching that *"nothing has its own individual being, but I am part of a spirit that I see in Jesus Christ, and that is my true identity and that can give me deep peace."*

- Do you believe that you are part of an interconnecting spirit that is your true identity?
- If so, is that just a belief, or do you experience that connection in some concrete ways?
- Can you give an example of that experience?

10. Professor Chung quotes her favorite words from the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas where Jesus talks about salvation: *"If you bring out what is within you, what is within you will save you. But if you cannot bring out what is within you, what is within you will destroy you."*

- In what ways have you experienced the truth of this statement in your own life?
- What does Professor Chung mean when she says 'what is within you is your true self'?

11. Paul Knitter says: *Gautama became Buddha because he woke up. Jesus, the son of Mary, became Christ, the son of God, because he woke up."*

- What does waking up mean? Waking up to what?
- Professor Knitter says Christ woke up to the divine spirit that was given to him in his very being. Who gave it to him? Who gives it to us? Is there a "giver" at all?

12. Paul Knitter quoted Karl Rahner as saying: *To say that Jesus is divine means that Jesus realized the full potential of what it means to be human."*

- Does this mean that there is no difference between us and Jesus except that we may not yet have awakened to our true identity?
- And if that's what it means, what is it like to imagine that there is no essential difference between you and Jesus?
- How would that affect the way you would relate to Jesus?

15. Professor Chung says that in difficult times in her life, the present moment pulled her through like a very loving mother. Again and again in Buddhist teachings we are told that if we can remain in the **present moment**, "it will provide all that we need."

- Why do you think the present moment is so greatly emphasized in this film?
- What's wrong with thinking about the past or dreaming about then future? Can't that be done mindfully as well?

13. Fr. Kennedy cautions us not to focus on 'self-improvement,' because that puts the emphasis back on the self and not on the present moment.

- Have you been intent on 'self-improvement' in your spiritual life or are you coming to accept your flaws and foibles?
- How do you work on self-acceptance in your own life and practice?

14. Professor Chung refers to the Kingdom of God as "a feast of equals where justice is flowing." How do you relate to this understanding?

15. Fr. Kennedy says that the purpose of meditation is compassionate outreach to others. And Paul Knitter cautions us about our tendency to work so hard on our own transformation that we forget about people who are poor and marginalized, and the policies that keep them poor and marginalized

- How does your practice inspire compassionate outreach to others? If it does not, how might you change that?

Note: If you would like to discuss Marie Howe's poem, "**Annunciation,**" please consider making copies for the group to have in hand as you discuss it.

ANNUNCIATION

Even if I don't see it again — nor ever feel it
I know it is — and that if once it hailed me
it ever does —

And so it is myself I want to turn in that direction
not as towards a place, but it was a tilting
within myself,

as one turns a mirror to flash the light to where
it isn't — I was blinded like that — and swam
in what shone at me

only able to endure it by being no one and so
specifically myself I thought I'd die
from being loved like that.

Marie Howe